

Thisle Really Needs a Sponsor For Development Says Oveson

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Utah Lt. Gov. Val Oveson today said there needs to be a sponsor of any water storage program at Thisle.

Oveson comments followed a meeting Thursday in Provo in which county and state officials sat down to discuss problems which linger two years after the Thisle Mudslide.

The most significant thing to come out of the meeting, Oveson said, "was the need for a sponsor for any development of the dam."

Oveson suggested possible sponsors could be the Central Utah Water Conservancy District, the Spanish Fork Water Users, Utah County or Spanish Fork City.

"The state is not in a position to solve all the problems," Oveson said.

County officials have noted the dam could be used for either seasonal flood control storage or a permanent reservoir could be created behind the dam.

Currently, the dam created by the Thisle Mudslide does not have water stored behind it. The water passes through a tunnel in Billies

Mountain. The tunnel was built after officials became concerned the mud dam would not be safe enough to permanently hold the water which backed up following the mudslide.

The Utah Engineer's Office is currently reviewing tests to determine whether the dam is currently safe.

"The first issue and overriding everything else is safety," Oveson said.

Also this morning, Utah County water engineer Doyle Winterton noted the tests are only determining whether there is movement in the dam. "And of course there is movement of some amount as the dam stabilizes," Winterton said.

He noted the state testing is not determining what would need to be done to make the dam safe.

Oveson noted the county is more optimistic than state workers that the dam can be made safe.

While the dam may be found safe enough to use for flood control (allowing some water to back up behind the dam during peak spring water flows in order to prevent the rushing waters from doing damage downstream), Oveson said using

Thisle as a reservoir for recreation or a power plant is a "long-shot."

He indicated safety factors may preclude such uses.

In addition to safety, two other issues which affect development of the dam are transportation and property rights.

The highway to Manti would have to be moved if the water is allowed to back up significantly behind the dam.

"We're hoping the governor will say: 'Highway (Utah Department of Transportation), we need you to move to a higher site because of the conditions which exist,'" Winterton said.

Oveson noted UDOT is insisting it cannot use highway funds to move the highway. He noted that CUWCD is picking up the tab for moving a highway in the area of the proposed Jordanelle Dam.

Likewise, a sponsor of development at Thisle may end up bearing the cost of moving the highway leading to Manti.

What would become of private property behind the dam if water is allowed to flood the area is also a concern.

Winterton noted the county is not in position to buy the landowners out unless it first determines it will put in a flood control project or reservoir.

"I don't see how the property owners can expect to be bought out now," he said. "If it stays the way it is now (no flood control project or reservoir), the owners will stay in limbo."

Meanwhile, the property owners are being discouraged from developing the area. The official designation of the "flood plain" was raised to 5180 feet above sea level. Those building in a flood plain cannot obtain flood insurance.

And, the county has also removed the designation of "public road" from some dirt roads in the area. Building must be on lots fronting a public road for builders to get building permits.

Thursday's meeting was put together by Utah County Commissioner J. Onell Miner. Those at the meeting included Miner, Oveson, Winterton, County Engineer Clyde Naylor, State Engineer, Bob Morgan, representatives of UDOT and the governor's office and a Thisle representative, Madge Haymond.